

John Martin House
502 High Street
Saltsburg
Indiana County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5422

HABS
PA,
32-SALT,
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JOHN MARTIN HOUSE

HABS No. PA-5422

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PA.
32-SALT,
4-

Location: 502 High St., Saltsburg, Conemaugh Township, Indiana County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Virgil H. and Dorothy Johnston.

Present Use: Single-family residence.

Significance: This vernacular frame dwelling is advantageously sited and is distinguished by unusual gingerbread ornamentation--such as a crenellated cornice--as well as serving as the longtime home of prominent local stone mason John Martin.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1853-54, according to tax records that indicate an increase in the lot's value from \$50 to \$700 from one year to the next.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands, historically lot Nos. 62, 63, and 64. Reference is to the Recorder of Deeds Office of the County of Indiana, Pennsylvania.

1849 Deed March 9, 1849, Volume 16, Page 45.

Moses Hart

TO

Robert McCrea (no mention of building)

1853 Deed April 13, 1853, Volume 19, Page 181.

Robert R. McCrea

TO

John Martin (frame dwelling mentioned)

after Will Book (no date given), Volume 6, Page 121.

1893 John Martin

TO
Thomas B. Martin

1937 Deed March 31, 1937, Volume 285, Page 445.
Thomas S. Barbor (for heirs of T.B. Martin, died October 1893)
TO
John M. Redpath

1949 Deed January 10, 1949, Volume 382, Page 126.
John M. Redpath
TO
Virgil H. and Dorothy Johnston

3. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been located. The structure was erected and remains essentially a rectangular, side-hall mass.
 4. Alterations and additions: A one-story, frame garage has been appended to the south facade, although historically an addition of this form has existed there. The entrance and flanking windows on the west facade are not original, but the original form and date of alteration are unknown.
- B. Historical Context: According to local legend, Saltsburg's master stone mason, John Martin (born 1820), lived in this house that he erected using a batch of wood given him by a carpenter as repayment for a large debt. Its distinctive form and design are supposed to replicate the family home in Enniskillen, Ireland, the only difference being the latter was constructed of stone. Martin emigrated in 1834 with his father from Ireland, and settled in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania. His career included work on the Sandy and Beaver Canals, an apprenticeship in the stone-cutting trade with Pagan and Company of Pittsburgh, and bridge construction. He arrived in Saltsburg in the early 1840s and served for six years as a foreman mason on the Northwestern Pennsylvania Railroad

Martin was responsible for several notable buildings in Saltsburg, including the Soldier's Monument in Edgewood Cemetery, the Western Pennsylvania Railroad Station, St. Matthew's Catholic Church and the Saltsburg Academy (see HABS entries for each), as well as this dwelling. He was treasurer of the Saltsburg Bridge Company, vice president of the cemetery organization, and a borough council member. Martin's stone-cutting yard was on Point Street just east of the canal (Arms, 383, 391).

For additional context, twenty-one reports on other buildings in Saltsburg may be consulted, as well as overview histories of the town of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438) and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666). See also, Sara Amy Leach, ed., Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg (Washington, DC: Historica American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The dwelling at 502 High St. is a modest, rectangular frame block embellished with eclectic Gothicky and Victorian elements.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: About 28' x 52', including addition (Sanborns).
2. Foundations: Stone, steeply banked.
3. Walls: Horizontal clapboard, two widths; corner boards.
4. Structural systems: Frame.
5. Porches: The single entrance on the north facade features an ornate, cantilevered porch that includes a concave, polygonal roof, crenellated cresting, stepped entablature, and two exaggerated brackets--all wood. The east facade porch is partial, one-story, and cantilevered over the central three bays (door and two windows) with a hipped roof and the same brackets. The west facade includes a raised, double-deck porch over the central three bays, supported by wood posts and pilasters with gingerbread bracing and ballustrade, crenellated cornice, boxed entablature; the basement level has plain, squared columnar supports on a brick foundation.
6. Chimneys: Two brick chimneys, at the ends of the hipped ridge line.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: There are two primary doorways. The north entrance is in the easternmost of the three bays; a single, wood door with flanking sidelights, transom and masonry steps with side walls. The east face contains a single wood door flanked by fixed four-light fenestration, all topped by a six-light transom. The west facade contains a central single door on the first floor, and two basement-level doors in the exterior bays.
- b. Windows and shutters: Most windows contain six-over-six-light double-hung sash, flanked by louvered shutters; these are largely arranged in a regular pattern on each elevation.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape: Low-pitched hip with asphalt shingles.
- b. Cornice: Boxed, convex cornice with crenellated wood cresting that is repeated on the porch rooflines.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Side-hall plan with the front space serving as a living room, behind which is a dining room, and behind that, the kitchen et al.
2. Stairways: Stairway in side hall features a central landing, riser-end carving, and a wood banister with turned newel post and posts.
3. Doors and doorways: Interior doorways are framed with wood architrave trim and bulls'-eye corners.
4. Decorative features: The living room features a large fireplace with a stark wood mantel designed to appear as if it is supported by canted pilasters with an S-curve mantle entablature. An elaborately patterned iron hearth inset with coal grate is located in the living room.

- D. Site: The complex John Martin House site is composed of three lots, oriented north to Washington Street. The house is banked into the steep slope, which establishes a two-level east face that opens onto an open field, and three-level west face, which looks down a hill toward the railway.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Old Views and maps:

The collection of the Saltsburg Branch, Historical and Genealogical Society of Indiana County, Stone House Museum, contains numerous historical images.

Beers, F.W. Atlas of Indiana County. New York: F.W. Beers and Co., 1871.

Johnson, George B., and Palmer, Ann. Saltsburg--The Way It Was--An Appreciation. Indiana, Pa.: A.G. Halldin Publishing Co., 1986.

Peelor, David, and Barker, W. "Map of Indiana County, Pennsylvania." North Hector, New York: 1856.

"Saltsburg, Pa." New York: Sanborn Map and Publishing Co. Ltd., February 1886; New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co. Ltd., October 1891, January 1897, July 1903; New York: Sanborn Map Company, April 1909, February 1927.

B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Indiana County, Pennsylvania, deed books and tax records.

C. Secondary and published sources:

Arms, C.T., and White, E. 1745-1880, History of Indiana County, Pennsylvania. Newark, Ohio: J. A. Caldwell, 1880.

Berringer, Gloria, ed. Canal Days Sesquicentennial: 1838-1988. No publisher, 1988.

Biographical and Historical Cyclopedia of Indiana and Armstrong Counties. Philadelphia: John M. Gresham and Co., 1891; reprinted 1982.

Johnson, George. Saltsburg and the Pennsylvania Canal. Historic Saltsburg, 1984.

McCullough, Robert, and Leuba, Walter. The Pennsylvania Main Line Canal. York, Pa.: American Canal and Transportation Center, 1973.

National Register of Historic Places Inventory, "Western Division of the

Pennsylvania Canal: Indiana and Westmoreland Counties." 1979/82.

Stewart, J.T. Indiana County, Pennsylvania: Her People, Past and Present.
Chicago: F.W. Beers and Co., 1913.

Wallner, Peter A. "Politics and Public Works: A Study of the Pennsylvania Canal System, 1825-1857." Ph.D diss., Pennsylvania State University, June 1973.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record in cooperation with the America's Industrial Heritage Project under the directorship of Randy Cooley; AIHP is an undertaking of the National Park Service, based in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Recorded under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, the project was completed during summer 1988 at the HABS field office in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Project leader was Alison K. Hoagland, senior HABS historian; field supervisor was Dorothy Burlingame, University of Vermont; project historian, Kristin Belz, University of Virginia. Large-format photography is by David Ames. Editing of the final report was done by Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

This report was completed as part of a larger project documenting two canal towns--Saltsburg, on the Western Division of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal, and Alexandria, on the Juniata Division--flanking the Allegheny Divide. Twenty-one reports on other buildings in Saltsburg, an overview history of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438), and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666) are part of the HABS/HAER collection. Twenty-two reports on buildings in Alexandria (Huntingdon County) and an overview history of Alexandria (HABS No. PA-5407) are also available. Results of the project were published as Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg, Sara Amy Leach, editor (Washington, DC: Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).